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ABSTRACT

In this study, Kentucky elementary school teachers provided feedback concerning the state's school reform process after 13 years of implementing the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA). Five counties were randomly selected out of twenty-four in western Kentucky, with one school chosen from each county. Elementary teachers who had taught from before 1990 to the present in each of the five schools were invited to complete a 41-item survey that examined challenges created by KERA, perceptions of KERA's effectiveness, thoughts concerning the implementation of KERA, and suggestions for improving Kentucky's education. Results showed that participants had several major concerns about KERA, including: lack of time to cover the vast amount of material required by KERA, significant increases in their stress levels, the pressure of the assessment process on teachers and students, the effect of test results and accountability procedures on their careers, the increased workload during and after school, restrictions of the curriculum, the changing of programs, emphasis placed on portfolios, the same requirement for all students regardless of students' abilities, and lack of time to listen to students' personal problems. (SM)

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Running head: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT EDUCATIONAL REFORM

ED 482 553

Teachers Have Their Turn: Teacher Perceptions And Attitudes about Educational Reform

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Abstract

The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 known as KERA is now in its thirteenth year of implementation. (1990-2003). To improve efficiency, a well-known leadership principle in industry is to ask for continual feedback from those who are actually performing the tasks, especially those who are experienced workers. While research has been conducted with superintendents and principals, teachers have had limited opportunities, especially on an on-going basis, to highlight challenges created by KERA, perceptions of KERA's effectiveness, thoughts concerning implementation of KERA, and suggestions for improving education in the state. This research provided pre-KERA elementary education teachers the long awaited opportunity to have a stake in Kentucky's reform efforts and to provide valuable information to all involved with school reform.

Five different counties were randomly selected from twenty-four counties that compose Western Kentucky. Then one school was chosen from each of those counties. With approval from the superintendents and principals, elementary teachers who had taught before 1990 to the present time in each of the five schools were invited to participate in taking a 41-item survey. Complete anonymity was provided to insure teachers answered candidly.

The results showed that the participants had major concerns about KERA. Their concerns included the following: the lack of time to cover the vast amount of material required by KERA, a significant increase in their stress levels, the pressure of the assessment process on teachers and students, the effect of test results and accountability procedures on their careers, the increased workload during and after school, the restrictions of the curriculum, the changing of programs, the emphasis placed on portfolios, the same requirements for all students regardless of students' abilities, and the lack of time to listen to students' personal problems.

Teachers Have Their Turn: Teacher Perceptions and Attitudes about Educational Reform

In 1990, the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) was implemented in schools throughout the state of Kentucky. It has now been thirteen years since the reform began. According to KERA, all students in Kentucky are to reach "proficiency" by the year 2014. Teachers, especially those who were teaching before KERA, have a unique perspective of challenges created by the reform, of perceptions of its effectiveness, of thoughts concerning implementation of KERA, and of improvements that could be made in Kentucky's education process.

Statement of the Problem

In talking with teachers in various settings, the researcher sensed a growing frustration in teachers. The teachers were not against setting standards but were concerned about the lack of a feedback system between them and state education officials (those mandating educational change). Some educational mandates were working and some were not working. However, teachers did not have a way to provide feedback to proper officials. Thus, this research was conducted to give teachers an opportunity to provide feedback about the school reform process in Kentucky after thirteen years of implementation.

Theoretical Grounding for the Problem

Upon review of KERA literature, there had been some research conducted with superintendents and principals about the implementation of KERA. At the beginning, state officials asked for teacher input. However, as KERA has progressed, teachers have had limited opportunities to give feedback on their attitudes and perceptions of challenges they face in implementing KERA standards, on its effectiveness, on its implementation, and on improvement of the education process in the state.

The researcher limited participation to veteran elementary teachers (those who had taught pre-KERA) who would have the most experience and a wider basis for evaluation and feedback. Therefore, pre-KERA teachers (those already teaching before 1990) were invited to participate in taking a 41-item survey to provide feedback in four areas:

- Challenges created by KERA,
- Perceptions of KERA's effectiveness,
- Thoughts concerning implementation of KERA, and
- Suggestions for improving education in Kentucky.

Summary of the Methods

Data Collection

This research was considered the first phase of an ongoing research project that would include the whole state of Kentucky. Five schools would be randomly selected from each of the four regions (north, south, east, and west). Elementary education was first in the feedback process. Additional research is planned for middle and secondary schools.

After conducting online research for divisional Kentucky maps, the researcher chose a map provided online by Editorial Services Company (www.kytravel.com/ktgmap.html) as a Kentucky Travel Guide. The state appeared to be divided evenly into the four areas. The researcher listed the following twenty-four counties as counties that geographically fall into Western Kentucky: Ballard, Caldwell, Calloway, Carlisle, Christian, Crittenden, Daviess, Fulton, Graves, Hancock, Henderson, Hickman, Hopkins, Livingston, Lyon, McCracken, McLean, Marshall, Muhlenberg, Ohio, Todd, Trigg, Union, and Webster.

Each of the twenty-four counties were printed on a piece of paper and placed in a container. Five counties were picked out of the container. Once the five counties were chosen, the researcher went to the Kentucky Department of Education Web Page (www.kde.state.ky.us) and printed out a list of the five school districts. If the county had a consolidated school district, then the one elementary school was automatically chosen. If the county had individual elementary schools, each school was printed on a piece of paper, placed in a container, and one school picked out of the container. Thus, the five counties and the five schools were randomly selected.

The superintendent from each school district was contacted by phone for permission to conduct the research. Once permission was granted, the researcher contacted the principals of each of the five schools by phone to get their permission. All the principals agreed. Each principal was then asked to provide a list of teachers who qualified as pre-KERA teachers. Then, each principal was asked to invite each of those teachers to participate in the survey.

The researcher scheduled a morning from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. to be at each school. The principal from each school provided a room (usually a conference room or the library) for the researcher to administer the survey. The teachers who desired to participate then came to that room and filled out the survey at their convenience. Each participant was given a cover letter explaining the purpose of the research and how the data would be used. There was no time limitations placed on the participants except the time constraints of their jobs.

The survey was constructed by the researcher with input from one colleague, one retired elementary teacher, one retired elementary school principal, and one practicing elementary teacher. There were Likert Scale type questions that teachers could check a response or circle a number indicating their levels of agreement or disagreement. In addition to those questions were three open-ended questions.

The analysis of the data included percentages, frequencies, means, and ranges. The open-ended responses were categorized, and representative items were chosen to reflect the overall attitudes and perceptions of the subjects.

The subjects for the study were limited to pre-KERA teachers (teachers who began teaching before 1990 when KERA was implemented). There were 41 female participants and one male participant. The mean age of the teachers was 49.5 years. The range in the ages of the participants was 39-59 years. There were 41 Caucasian subjects and one African American subject. The mean number of years that the subjects taught was 24 years. The range of the number of years taught was 14-35 years. Nine teachers had taught from 14-19 years; twenty-two

teachers had taught from 20-29 years; and ten teachers had taught from 30-35 years. One of the subjects held an Education Specialist Degree; twenty-two subjects held a Masters Degree; seventeen subject held a Rank I Fifth Year Certification; one subject held a Rank II; and one subject held a Bachelor of Science Degree.

Results

The overall return rate was 73.7 percent. Each school's return rate is shown below.

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Total
Percent of Return	100%	46%	65%	100%	91%	73.7%

The four areas that were covered on the survey were as follows: challenges created by KERA, perceptions of KERA's effectiveness, thoughts concerning implementation of KERA, and suggestions for improving education in Kentucky.

Challenges Created by KERA

In this section of the survey, subjects were asked nine questions—7 involved checking one of five levels of answers, one question asking for a percentage of their time spent on implementing KERA, and an open-ended question asking the subject to list additional challenges that they faced since KERA was implemented.

For the seven questions that required the subjects to check a level of response, the responses were assigned a numerical value, means were computed for each school, and a grand mean was then calculated. The results are indicated for each school. Each question is charted below:

Question: I spend _____ time in class preparation since KERA has been implemented.						
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Grand Mean
Significantly less						
Less						
The same amount of						
More	X					
Significantly more		X	X	X	X	X

The responses to this question indicated that subjects in four out of the five schools surveyed felt that they spent significantly more time in class preparation than before KERA was implemented. The Grand Mean indicates that the subjects as a group perceived that they spent significantly more time in class preparation since the implementation of KERA.

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Question: I complete _____ reports since KERA has been implemented.						
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Grand Mean
Significantly fewer						
Fewer						
The same amount of						
More						
Significantly more	X	X	X	X	X	X

When the subjects had to respond to the question above, they all felt that they had to complete significantly more reports since KERA was implemented.

Question: I attend _____ meetings since KERA has been implemented.						
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Grand Mean
Significantly fewer						
Fewer						
The same amount of						
More						
Significantly more	X	X	X	X	X	X

All the subjects also indicated that they attended significantly more meetings since KERA began.

Question: Because of KERA standards, the course content that I teach _____.						
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Grand Mean
Is significantly less restricted						
Is less restricted						
Is about the same as before KERA						
Is more restricted	X	X		X	X	X
Is significantly more restricted			X			

In reference to the curriculum becoming more restricted since KERA's implementation, four out of five schools indicated that the course content was more restricted. The subjects at one school felt that the course content was significantly more restricted. Overall, the subjects felt that the course content was more restricted than before KERA.

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Question: The work load has _____ since KERA has been implemented.						
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Grand Mean
Significantly decreased						
Decreased						
Remained the same						
Increased						
Significantly Increased	X	X	X	X	X	X

All subjects at all of the schools perceived that their work loads had significantly increased since KERA was implemented.

Question: I have _____ time to adequately teach core content evaluated by CATS (Commonwealth Accountability Testing System).						
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Grand Mean
Significantly less						
Less	X	X	X	X	X	X
The same amount of						
More						
Significantly more						

With all the subjects indicating that their work loads have significantly increased, it is not surprising to see that all the subjects felt that they had less time to adequately teach core content.

Question: Implementation of KERA has _____ my stress level.						
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Grand Mean
Significantly lessened						
Lessened						
Had no effect on						
Increased	X	X				
Significantly increased			X	X	X	X

Finally, the subjects were asked to indicate their stress level since KERA was implemented. All subjects responded that their stress levels had increased. Subjects at two schools indicated that the stress levels had increased while the subjects at three schools felt that their stress levels had significantly increased. By calculating the Grand Mean, the overall perceptions by the subjects were that the stress levels had significantly increased.

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The eighth question under "Challenges Created by KERA" asked subjects to "Estimate the percentage of time that you spend in implementing KERA mandates." The following chart indicates the responses by school with the Grand Mean included.

Question: Estimate the percentage of time that you spend in implementing KERA mandates.						
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Grand Mean
Percentage of time	85%	82%	89%	93%	78%	85%

The final question was an open-ended question that asked the subjects to "List any additional challenges that you face since KERA has been implemented." The following list of challenges was compiled as to the order of frequency that the subjects listed the particular challenge. The first challenge listed was the challenge most frequently listed by the subjects, etc. They were as follows:

- Having enough time to teach
- Covering all of the core content
- Keeping up with the amount of paperwork
- Attending increased numbers of meetings
- Coping with high stress levels
- Dealing with multi-age grade levels
- Dealing with the high emphasis on test scores
- Having such a restricted curriculum
- Having to work so many hours after school
- Trying to keep up with ever changing programs
- Dealing with portfolio development

Subjects wrote such comments as follows:

"Additional challenges I face are more emphasis on test results instead of pre/post student progress, more paperwork and time on documents and committees instead of direct teaching, and more restrictions and less 'teacher' input/control of the classroom."

"I am constantly being reminded of our school's test scores. How many points we must make to improve over last year's score. I must cover all the standards on the core content. There are at least 500 items to cover. My students are only 8 years old. Let them be 8 years old."

"I work until 4:30-5:00 in the afternoon at school. Then I take work home at night. Time. There seems to be an ever increasing amount of work placed on the teachers...."

"Teachable moments and fun activities to enrich the children's experiences have been totally cut out because we are so driven to cover the content and afraid to get 'off schedule.' The whole environment that we create is stressful to everyone."

"One of the greatest challenges is trying to assist all students to the proficient level. All students are able to learn, but not in the same way and not at the same rate."

"Since KERA has been implemented, teachers have more responsibilities, meetings, and stress than they can handle. The stress level is very high in our school."

"The amount of paperwork and additional meetings are overwhelming."

"Too many new programs are being implemented with nothing being taken away."

Perceptions of KERA's Effectiveness

The next section of the survey had subjects to answer eleven questions. Six of the questions required the subjects to check one of five responses that indicated the subject's level of response. The next five questions required the subjects to circle a number from one to ten to indicate whether the subject agreed or disagreed. The results are as follows:

Question: KERA has had _____ effect on Kentucky education.						
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Grand Mean
A significantly negative						
A negative					X	
No	X	X	X	X		X
A positive						
A significantly positive						

The subjects at four schools indicated that KERA has had no effect on Kentucky education. Subjects of one school indicated that KERA had a negative effect on Kentucky education. The Grand Mean showed that the subjects as a whole felt that KERA has had no effect on Kentucky education.

Question: KERA has _____ the level of education in Kentucky since its implementation in 1990.						
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Grand Mean
Significantly lowered						
Lowered						
Had no effect on	X	X	X	X	X	X
Improved						
Significantly improved						

As shown by the chart above, subjects at each school felt that KERA has had no effect on the level of education in Kentucky since its implementation in 1990.

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Question: Because of KERA standards, I feel _____ to teach.						
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Grand Mean
Significantly less prepared						
Less prepared						
No different in being prepared	X		X	X	X	X
More prepared		X				
Significantly more prepared						

Subjects in Schools A, C, D, and E felt that there was no difference in their level of being prepared to teach. In School B, the subjects did feel that they were more prepared to teach because of KERA standards. However, the Grand Mean indicated that the subjects as a whole felt that there was no difference in their levels of being prepared to teach because of KERA standards.

Question: KERA has provided _____ physical resources for my classroom.						
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Grand Mean
Significantly fewer						
Fewer						
The same amount of	X	X	X		X	X
More				X		
Significantly more						

Only subjects from School D felt that KERA had provided more physical resources for their classrooms. The Grand Mean showed that the subjects as a whole felt that KERA had provided the same amount of physical resources for their classrooms as they would have had if KERA had not been implemented.

Question: KERA has provided _____ technological resources for my classroom.						
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Grand Mean
Significantly fewer						
Fewer						
The same amount of						
More	X	X	X	X	X	X
Significantly more						

Subjects at all of the schools felt that KERA had provided more technological resources for their classrooms than they would have had without KERA's implementation.

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Question: KERA has provided _____ monetary resources for my classroom.						
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Grand Mean
Significantly fewer						
Fewer						
The same amount of	X	X	X		X	X
More				X		
Significantly more						

Again, subjects at only one school felt that KERA had provided more monetary resources for their classrooms than would have been available if KERA had not been implemented. The Grand Mean indicated that this was also the conclusion of the overall group of subjects.

The following five questions allowed the subjects to indicate their levels of agreement or disagreement by circling a number from one to ten. The following charts will indicate their responses.

Question: I support the continuance of KERA.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A				X						
School B						X				
School C			X							
School D					X					
School E					X					
Grand Mean				X						

There was a range of answers from the subjects on whether they supported KERA. With indicators ranging from "1" to "10", subjects could not circle a number that was neutral. If they circled a "5", then their level of agreement fell within the disagree category. If they circled a "6", then their level of agreement fell within the agree category. Shown in the chart above, responses of the subjects from four of the schools fell within the disagree category. Subjects in only one school agreed that they supported the continuance of KERA. The Grand Mean indicated that the majority of the subjects did not support the continuance of KERA.

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Question: CATS (Commonwealth Accountability Testing System) has effectively evaluated students' progress.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A					X					
School B				X						
School C				X						
School D				X						
School E				X						
Grand Mean				X						

All the subjects disagreed that CATS had effectively evaluated students' progress. However, they did not strongly disagree.

Question: Portfolios have effectively evaluated students' progress.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A					X					
School B					X					
School C		X								
School D		X								
School E			X							
Grand Mean			X							

Subjects from three schools strongly disagreed and subjects from two schools disagreed that portfolios had effectively evaluated students' progress. The Grand Mean indicated that the subjects did disagree that portfolios effectively evaluated students' progress.

Question: The curriculum that I teach is directly related to KERA standards.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A								X		
School B									X	
School C									X	
School D										X
School E									X	
Grand Mean									X	

All subjects strongly agreed that the curriculum that they teach is directly related to KERA standards. It shows that although teachers have concerns about KERA, they are implementing KERA standards in their teaching.

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Question: The school-based decision-making council's decisions have improved my school.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A							X			
School B							X			
School C							X			
School D						X				
School E						X				
Grand Mean							X			

All the subjects agreed that the school-based decision-making councils' decisions had improved their schools.

Thoughts Concerning the Implementation of KERA

The third section of the survey addressed the subjects' thoughts concerning the implementation of KERA. There were eleven "agree/disagree" questions and one open-ended question. The eleven questions allowed the subjects to circle a number from one to ten to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement. The charts below show the degree to which the subjects agreed or disagreed.

Question: I am knowledgeable about KERA mandates.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A									X	
School B									X	
School C								X		
School D									X	
School E								X		
Grand Mean									X	

All the subjects strongly agreed that they were knowledgeable about KERA mandates. Obviously, there was enough training and/or time for them to feel confident in their knowledge of what was required by KERA.

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Question: I have received adequate training in KERA.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A									X	
School B								X		
School C								X		
School D								X		
School E								X		
Grand Mean								X		

The subjects who took this survey strongly agreed that they had received adequate training in KERA requirements.

Question: I had input as KERA was being developed.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A			X							
School B				X						
School C		X								
School D				X						
School E				X						
Grand Mean			X							

The subjects in School C strongly disagreed that they had input as KERA was being developed. The rest of the subjects disagreed that they had input. The Grand Mean indicated that these subjects perceived that they had little input into KERA as it was being developed.

Question: KERA was well developed.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A				X						
School B				X						
School C		X								
School D			X							
School E			X							
Grand Mean			X							

All the subjects disagreed that KERA was well developed. School C indicated strong disagreement that KERA was well developed. The Grand Mean shows that the subjects as a whole disagreed that KERA was well developed.

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Question: I am satisfied with the way KERA has been implemented.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A				X						
School B					X					
School C			X							
School D				X						
School E			X							
Grand Mean			X							

Subjects at School B seemed to be more satisfied with the way KERA was implemented than subjects at the other schools. The Grand Mean indicated that the subjects at the five schools disagreed that they were satisfied with the way KERA had been implemented.

Question: As a professional, the Kentucky Department of Education has requested my feedback on the effectiveness of KERA.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A				X						
School B				X						
School C			X							
School D				X						
School E				X						
Grand Mean				X						

All the subjects indicated that they disagreed that their professional feedback on the effectiveness of KERA was requested by the Kentucky Department of Education. The lack of feedback to state officials was obviously limited.

Question: As a professional, my administration has requested my feedback on the effectiveness of KERA.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A				X						
School B					X					
School C				X						
School D				X						
School E					X					
Grand Mean				X						

The subjects also disagreed that their administrations requested their professional feedback on the effectiveness of KERA.

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Question: As a professional, I feel free to provide feedback on challenges that I have encountered with KERA.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A						X				
School B						X				
School C						X				
School D		X								
School E				X						
Grand Mean					X					

While subjects in three of the schools agreed that they felt free to provide feedback, the previous charts indicated that they have not been asked about KERA's effectiveness. Subjects from two of the schools disagreed that they did not feel free to provide feedback on the challenges that they have encountered with KERA. The Grand Mean indicated that the subjects as a whole disagreed that they felt free to provide feedback on challenges that they had encountered with KERA.

Question: I feel that my feedback is valued and makes a difference.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A				X						
School B				X						
School C			X							
School D		X								
School E				X						
Grand Mean			X							

None of the subjects who took this survey felt that their feedback made a difference. They all disagreed that their feedback was valued and made a difference. Subjects at one school strongly disagreed.

Question: KERA has changed because of feedback that I have provided.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A		X								
School B			X							
School C		X								
School D	X									
School E			X							
Grand Mean		X								

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The subjects in all of the schools strongly disagreed that KERA had changed because of feedback that they had provided. The fact that they felt disconnected to the KERA process could account for the negative feelings that they have toward KERA.

Question: KERA standards are appropriate for students in Kentucky.										
	Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School A			X							
School B				X						
School C			X							
School D			X							
School E				X						
Grand Mean			X							

The subjects indicated that they disagreed that KERA standards were appropriate for students in Kentucky. Therefore, if the subjects perceived that the standards were inappropriate, this situation may be causing the high stress levels that the subjects indicated earlier under "Challenges Created by KERA."

The final question that was asked in this section of the survey was "What additional factors affect your ability to implement KERA?" The subjects were provided with a space labeled "Enhances your ability" and a space labeled "Restricts your ability." The subjects' responses listed below were representative of the factors that enhanced and restricted their abilities to implement KERA.

'Enhances your ability'. The following quotes were representative of those responses most often given by the subjects:

- "KERA has caused us to align the curriculum to match the standards."
- "Core content tells me what areas to focus on."
- "Since KERA, there has been consistent funding."
- "Schools are more open to parents."
- "Technology has been increased."
- "Arts and humanities have improved in the schools."
- "School-based decision-making councils have helped the schools."

'Restricts your ability'. These quotes reflect those responses most often given by the participants:

- "We have limited "teachable moment" opportunities due to the core requirements."
- "There are too many committees and meetings."
- "The main restrictions that I see are the constant changes of programs, requirements, and paperwork which restrict my ability to be an effective teacher and to meet KERA Goals."
- "I don't feel that I have enough time to cover the curriculum content well before testing."
- "I spend the majority of my time in the classroom on writing portfolios and/or preparing students to take the test."

- "I feel there is no time to listen and understand students' personal problems."
- "KERA limits the amount of flexibility I should have to teach necessary topics that arise day-to-day."

Suggestions for Improving Education in Kentucky

This is the final section of the survey. There was one open-ended question that asked the participants "What suggestions do you have to improve education in Kentucky?" The following responses were representative of those given by the participants.

Participant Quote 1: "I feel we must be able to compare our testing with national norms. KCCT is not valid and is extremely subjective. We are also requiring children (9 and 10 years old) to do things that are not developmentally appropriate."

Participant Quote 2: "Many positive changes have occurred since KERA; however, in my opinion, one big problem exists. Our assessments that determine rewards or sanctions should include a way to factor in the ability of students to learn. Believe me; I think all students can learn. I just don't believe that if they don't reach the same level (proficiency) then the teacher can't teach. The other problem I have with KERA is the emphasis on portfolios. I believe we have performed a measure of overkill in making the demands we have. My overall concern is that the pressure put on teachers and students to perform has created a less than healthy learning environment—too much stress."

Participant Quote 3: "Students/parents should be more accountable for test scores. Set realistic goals. The 2014 goal to me is not realistic unless they manipulate scores. I think we "teach" the test. You know your scores will be in the newspaper and you feel you must improve *every* year. Life becomes just about the "test." You consider the "test" even in the primary grades and how you can prepare your students."

Participant Quote 4: "I feel there are many positive aspects to KERA, SBDM [School-Based Decision Making] being one of them, the ability to address multi-age and multiple intelligences being another. I am in no way against accountability testing but I am against the format in which it is currently done. As a teacher, I am accountable for helping each child reach his/her full potential. The way the system is now, I may be successful in doing that in 2002 and my class has high scores. However, in 2003, my students may make tremendous gains toward reaching their full potential; but, because their scores are compared to the scores of the students from the year before, it looks as if we are a school in decline. This is comparing apples to oranges. If you want to show true progress and true success, you must compare students to themselves and show steady growth and progress as they move from K through 12th grade. I am a firm believer in the statement "All Children Can Learn"; but, they are not all going to learn in the same way or at the same level. Was that not the reason for KERA to begin with? So how can we possibly make a statement that all children will be proficient by the year 2014? That is as preposterous as the medical community making the statement that all children born in Kentucky will be born without any birth defects by the year 2014."

Conclusions/Implications of the Study

The purpose of this research was to allow teachers a means of providing feedback concerning the school reform process in Kentucky after thirteen years of implementation. Pre-KERA teachers in five schools in Western Kentucky were invited to participate in this survey. The four areas surveyed were as follows: challenges created by KERA, perceptions of KERA's effectiveness, thoughts concerning the implementation of KERA, and suggestions for improving education in Kentucky.

The participants highlighted challenges created by KERA. The subjects indicated that they spent significantly more time in class preparation, completed significantly more reports, and attended significantly more meetings than before implementation of KERA. They also had a significantly increased work load and a significantly increased stress level since KERA was implemented. The subjects felt that the curriculum was more restricted because of KERA standards. Those who participated in taking the survey indicated that they spent 85 percent of their time implementing KERA mandates. In order of frequency, the subjects listed the following additional challenges: having enough time to teach, covering all of the core content, keeping up with the amount of paperwork, attending increased numbers of meetings, coping with high stress levels, dealing with multi-age grade levels, dealing with the high emphasis on test scores, having such a restricted curriculum, having to work so many hours after school, trying to keep up with ever changing programs, and dealing with portfolio development.

The subjects indicated their perceptions of KERA's effectiveness. They felt that KERA has had no effect on Kentucky education and that KERA has had no effect on the level of education in Kentucky since its implementation in 1990. The participants also indicated that they felt no difference in their level of preparedness to teach because of KERA standards than they did before KERA was implemented. As a whole, the subjects indicated that KERA had provided the same amount of physical resources and monetary resources for their classrooms but had provided more technological resources. The subjects at only one school agreed to support the continuance of KERA; as a group, they did not agree to support the continuance of KERA. The subjects disagreed that CATS (Commonwealth Accountability Testing System) and portfolios effectively evaluated students' progress. All of the participants strongly agreed that the curriculum that they taught was directly related to KERA standards. All the subjects agreed that the school-based decision-making councils' decisions had improved their schools.

In the third section of the survey, the participants addressed their thoughts concerning the implementation of KERA. They strongly agreed that they were knowledgeable about KERA mandates and that they had received adequate training in KERA. All of the subjects indicated that they had little input into KERA as it was being developed, that they felt that it was not well developed, and that they were not satisfied with the way KERA had been implemented. As professionals, those who participated in the survey disagreed that the Kentucky Department of Education or their administrations had requested their feedback on the effectiveness of KERA. However, the subjects were divided about the feelings of being free to provide feedback on challenges that they encountered with KERA. Overall, the group did not feel free to provide that kind of feedback. The participants did not feel that their feedback was valued and made a difference or that KERA had changed because of feedback that they had provided. They

disagreed that KERA standards were appropriate for students in Kentucky. When asked what additional factors enhanced their abilities to implement KERA, they gave such positive responses as educational standards, core content, consistent funding, more parent-friendly schools, increased technology, improved arts and humanities, and school-based decision-making councils. When asked what additional factors restricted their abilities to implement KERA, they listed the following: limited "teachable moment" opportunities, too many committees and meetings, constantly changing programs, lack of time to cover the curriculum, too much time spent on portfolio development, no time for students' problems, and lack of flexibility in teaching topics that arise day-to-day.

Finally, the participants made suggestions for improving education in Kentucky. The quotes that were given were representative of responses made by several of the participants. They stated that Kentucky must be able to compare their scores with national norms, that too much emphasis is placed on portfolios, that lack of student progress does not necessarily mean teacher failure, that "the test" has become everything, that the scores that are being compared from year to year are invalid because they are comparing two groups without matching subjects, and that there is not enough time for all children to be proficient by the year 2014.

These 42 participants had a wealth of experience (990 years of teaching). They shared valuable feedback in order to improve the educational reform efforts in Kentucky.

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